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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000395

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [IN](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: INDIA COMMITTED TO PUL-I-KHUMRI, INTERESTED IN
COLLABORATING ON OTHER PROJECTS IN AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt, Reason 1.5 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary: On January 12, MEA Joint Secretary (Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran) Arun K Singh and newly appointed Ambassador to Afghanistan Rakesh Sood provided an update on Indian projects in Afghanistan, noting proudly that with the exception of the Parliament building and the Pul-i-Khumri to Kabul power transmission line, all projects sponsored by the GOI were either under construction or nearing completion. India remains committed to finishing the Pul-i-Khumri electric transmission line, and understands its importance for Afghanistan's long-term development, Singh said, promising that he would encourage financial approval for the project with a view to starting construction in April (with a roughly two-three year completion time). The GOI would be open to new projects in Afghanistan, including those carried out in cooperation with the US. Transit rights through Pakistan would allow the GOI to do more. End Summary.

India Committed to Pul-i-Khumri

12. (C) The Pul-i-Khumri to Kabul transmission line is "still something India is prepared to do," Singh stated, noting that an Indian team had already done a survey of the site and that the project would soon go before the Indian cabinet for financial approval. He promised to push for approval during the winter months, when construction cannot take place, and speculated that if all goes well, work could begin in April. Singh said he would encourage a planning team to go to Afghanistan, even while New Delhi was deciding on the funding, so that work could proceed as quickly as possible. He estimated that the project would take two-three years to complete, once work begins.

13. (C) Asked about obstacles to the Pul-i-Khumri project, Singh replied that Taliban and Northern Alliance mines remain in the area, and hoped the US could provide assistance in this area. The mountainous terrain presents another obstacle, he said. Newly appointed Ambassador to Afghanistan Rakesh Sood remarked on the lack of transit rights through Pakistan. If Indian equipment is allowed to transit Pakistan, "maybe we can get somewhere" on the Pul-i-Khumri line, he mused, noting the high cost of shipping Indian equipment via Iran. Pakistan may not be ready for normal transit or trade, but this equipment is for aid, he stated, encouraging the US to raise the issue with Pakistan. Sood told us that India would also appreciate US airlift assistance as necessary to move equipment through mountainous terrain.

14. (C) PolCouns underlined the importance of the Pul-i-Khumri project for the immediate and long-term development of Afghanistan, and encouraged Singh to come back to us with ideas to move the project ahead as quickly as possible. Singh said that India understands the importance of the Pul-i-Khumri line, and noted that the Afghan government had also stressed the significance of the project in bilateral meetings. "We understand that this is priority number one," because it would bring power to Kabul, he stated.

US-India Collaboration

15. (C) Singh stated that as a non-traditional donor, India is "certainly stretched" by providing aid to Afghanistan, but said New Delhi is open to new ideas for projects, as all the current projects are nearing completion. The GOI hopes to focus on institution building and training programs for the Afghan government, and would like to broaden bilateral interaction to include education and health.

16. (C) Sood emphasized the need to find projects on which the US and India could collaborate, noting that there are not enough projects where "India can be seen working closely with the US." PolCouns noted USAID Administrator Natsios' earlier discussion on US-India collaboration in Afghanistan, and stressed the need for greater information sharing on on-going Indian projects there through our missions in Kabul. Sood also encouraged the idea of direct contacts between Indian consulates in Afghanistan and the relevant US PRTs.

17. (SBU) Singh provided an update on other on-going projects in Afghanistan, saying that:

-- Construction teams and equipment for the Zaranj-Delaram road have been on the ground since December. The project is expected to take two years to complete;

-- Work is already underway on the Salma Dam and will be completed within four years;

-- Indian builders have completed construction of cold storage food warehouses in Khandahar;

-- Construction on the Habibia school will be completed in 2005;

-- Renovation of the Indira Gandhi hospital will be completed by March or April;

-- India still plans to construct a new building for the Afghan parliament, but the Afghan government has not yet selected land for the project. According to Singh, "the ball is in the Afghan court."

Uncomfortable With Taliban Rehabilitation

18. (C) India remains "very uncomfortable" with the idea of Taliban rehabilitation, Singh stated, arguing that even if they were not involved in the atrocities of Taliban rule, former Taliban adherents still subscribed to a radical Islamic ideology. Now is the time to build up moderate leaders, he argued, speculating that rehabilitated Taliban would seek to "fill the leadership vacuum in Pashtun areas."

19. (U) Minimize considered.
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